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TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM KDEM SOCI RS

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN LUKIN ON NGO
RE-REGISTRATION, DEMOCRACY ROUNDTABLE

REF: MOSCOW 9565

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) In a September 22 meeting with the Ambassador, Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin endorsed moving forward on the proposed U.S.-Russian roundtable on democracy and human rights, and said he was prepared to discuss modalities when in Washington October 10-12. Lukin offered to intercede on behalf of NGOs worried about excessive red tape in the re-registration process mandated by the new NGO law and concerned that they may have to cease program activities if not fully re-registered by October 18. The problem of corruption in Russia was best broached by the two presidents.

The antidotes to corruption in Russia, Lukin thought, were good anti-trust legislation, a government willing to enforce the law, and political will. Lukin also mentioned recent ethnic violence in Kondopoga (Karelia) as a by-product of globalization, societal factors, and inaction by the local authorities.

U.S.- Russian Roundtable on Democracy
and Human Rights: A Good Idea

¶2. (C) Lukin told Ambassador that Presidential Advisor Prikhodko had agreed for the Administration to an expert-level, non-governmental roundtable on democracy and human rights. Lukin was prepared to travel to the U.S. October 10-12 to develop the idea further. He thought he might have an opportunity to discuss the roundtable with President Putin in early October.

NGO Re-registration: Lukin Willing to Intercede

¶3. (C) The Ambassador summarized for Lukin Federal Registration Service (FRS) Director Movchan's August 30 assertion (reftel) that NGOs, which had submitted their documents but were not re-registered by the October 18 deadline, would be allowed to continue operations. Since that meeting, some NGOs had been told by the FRS that they would have to suspend all but internal operations after October 18 until re-registered by the FRS. (Note: In a September 19 meeting with Embassy representatives and a private-sector lawyer, FRS Director of Registration of Political Parties, NGOs, and Other Organizations Zhafyarov contended that NGOs not registered by October 18 would indeed have to halt all but internal operations, and produced a

two-page document, which he said had just been posted on the FRS website, to buttress his claim.)

¶14. (C) Lukin said that several Russian human rights NGOs had expressed similar concerns. His office was soliciting input on the re-registration process in the regions. Lukin noted several potential stumbling blocks in the process: confusion about the October 18 deadline, an excessively bureaucratic process which "sometimes looks as if someone is asking for a bribe" and, "frankly," the "absence of order in the approach of some organizations" to the re-certification process. Lukin asked that the affected NGOs make their complaint to his office in writing, and he would endeavor to intercede with the FRS.

Corruption: USG Should Broach Subject
at the Highest Levels

¶15. (C) Lukin agreed with Ambassador that corruption was a serious problem, and suggested that the solution lay in good anti-trust legislation administered by an "impartial" government possessing the requisite political will to tackle the problem. The best way for the USG to approach the GOR, Lukin thought, would be if the two presidents engaged in a "constructive, practical" exchange of opinions. Much depended on the leadership, Lukin thought, noting that corruption in the Soviet Union was less widespread when Andropov --"a personally modest man"-- was General Secretary, then had been the case under other Soviet leaders.

Local, Global Factors Contribute to

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Ethnic Violence in Russia

¶16. (C) In a September 22 conversation with Ambassador, Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin sourced recent ethnic unrest in the town of Kondopoga (Karelia) both to "deeper, societal causes" and to failures by the local police and the Kondopoga city administration. (Note: A mid-September barroom brawl resulting in several deaths in Kondopoga was portrayed in the press and by rightist, anti-immigrant groups as the by-product of tensions between Slavs and "outsiders" from the Caucasus.) Lukin, who had traveled to Kondopoga to investigate in the wake of the September violence, described to Ambassador the sequence of events as he understood them and noted with approval that four criminal cases had been opened there, including one against the local police force, which had "done nothing" to stop the violence. Lukin traced the incident to "the weakness of the police and of the local administration" in Kondopoga, but added that a relatively high local unemployment rate (5.2 percent) may have added fuel to the fire.

¶17. (C) In response to questions from the Ambassador, Lukin admitted that extremism of all kinds is increasing. He thought the media played a role in fanning the flames but, noting similar incidents in other countries, suggested that globalization and migration were contributing factors. Lukin believed that President Putin was worried about the problem, and was looking to "civilized patriotism" as an antidote to extremism. Some in Russia, Lukin noted parenthetically, saw extremism as the inevitable by-product of a "refusal to adopt international values."

Comment

¶18. (C) It was clear in his conversation with the Ambassador that Lukin understood the importance of allowing NGOs not successful in clearing all hurdles to re-registration before

October 18 to remain in business. Ambassador has brought NGO uncertainties about the re-registration process to the attention of Duma Speaker Gryzlov and Duma Chairman of the International Relations Committee Kosachev. He plans within the next week to reinforce NGO concerns with Chairwoman of the Presidential Council for Human Rights Panfilova and Deputy Foreign Minister Yakovenko. Embassy has brought its concerns about the varying interpretations of the October 18 deadline directly to the attention of the FRS, and is currently working through the American Chamber of Commerce to have NGOs petition Lukin's office. (Septel will offer a scorecard of the current state-of-play among re-registering international NGOs.)

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